

Change in the Religious Music
of the Catholic Church on Aruba

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Over the years changes have occurred in various sectors of modern life some being noticed more so than others. Since I have always had an interest in music, the general trend toward a change from the use of music originating in Europe toward music reflecting the Antillian style presented for me an interesting subject for study. My interest was further aroused when I discovered that this trend in music was a relatively new movement exclusive to the Catholic Churches on the three islands of the Netherland Antilles: Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao. It is now still in its incipient stages and has as yet to be completely accepted and utilized. Proceeding in my study I found that many factors influenced this new growth of the Church. In some cases the change has been attributed to seemingly materialistic and practical necessities and yet at other times attributed to such factors as aesthetic and religious feelings.

In this paper I will try to explore the reasons for this change and relate this musical trend in the light of the Ecumenical movement in the Church and the structure of the individual social group. My study is mainly rooted in the examination of St. Theresa Church in Sint Nicolaas. This, however, is contrasted with a minor and incomplete study of St. Anna Church in Noord. I have chosen this second community in order to reflect the influence the different social groups have on change.

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Nevertheless, these are not the only factors involved; there are others and, most importantly, the attitudes of the individual people in policy making positions in each parish.

I have used various methods in gaining my information and have been most fortunate in that many people were willing to speak with me and help me as much as they could. However, since it is a new movement besides dealing with a topic not normally studied, few people were knowledgeable of the subject. Those that were involved, however, seemed delighted to find that I had an interest in their work. Nevertheless, from the sketchy details gathered from each informant, I have, I hope, explored the topic as much as is possible at the present time. I have tried to diversify my informants in order to get a picture of the change from different angles. I have also made use of a tape recorder and have taped selections of the music presently being used in the Churches. As I discuss it I will indicate what to listen to so that what I am referring to will be illustrated and thus understood.

In order to follow this change in religious music one must first be acquainted with the background from which it arose. Previously all music used in the Churches of Aruba had been of a European background. It had been brought over with the Dutch missionaries and had been

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in use until the Ecumenical Council brought about widespread reform in the Church that included the use of the vernacular, or the native language, in the Mass. Up until this time all Masses said had been done so in Latin. With the use of the vernacular, a change was also needed in the music of the Church. Of course, they had sung some songs in the native language before the Ecumenical movement began but the greater part of them were sung in Latin. These Gregorian chants had been in use in the Church from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and it was generally felt by the clergy that newer songs should replace them. For, the greater proportion of the people could not understand the words and could not sing them because of their intricate melodies. The Church, being slow to change and also due to a shortage of composers willing to revise or write new music, found that she lacked appropriate music for Mass. This was decidedly true for Aruba and the rest of the Netherland Antilles. While a store of English, Dutch, and Spanish songs among others had been built up over the years, no one had really attempted to translate songs on a large scale into Papiamentu, or even compose songs for that language. Aruba had always depended upon outside sources for its religious music and did not develop any tradition of writing religious music of its own. It must be taken into consideration, however, the size of the

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island and the time span involved. It was within the past ten years that the vernacular replaced Latin in the Church. Before this some European songs had been translated by a few of the clergy into Papiamento but these had only been sung at special services celebrating major feasts of the Church. These could not be expected to replace all the other songs.

But more importantly than the mere translation of a few songs into Papiamento was the desire to incorporate the music of the islands into religious worship. Never before had authentic Antillian music been sung or played in Church. It seemed that with the Ecumenical movement came a more definite step toward a deeper involvement with the people and their culture. The Catholic Church now found it acceptable to celebrate Mass in the people's own tongue and sing not only in their language but also using their rhythms in the religious music.

The reasons behind all this are not really seen clearly even by those involved and supporting the change. As I talked with individuals concerned with the movement, I heard varied reasons which, if taken all together and regarded as a whole, do make a valid basis for the support of the movement. While I spoke with informant A, she admitted her disappointment with the quality of the Antillian music so far produced. She does not consider herself Arubian and does not feel a kinship with

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the Arubian culture; this of course, would differentiate her feelings from those of Arubians. However, she presented an interesting supposition. She said she felt that this growth of Antillian music in the Church was a manifestation of the nationalistic feeling that is present among the people. She feels that this is only a byproduct of the Arubian people's desire to have their own culture and a rejection of the Dutch influence on the island. However, the clergy and lay people I have talked with did not express the importance of this aspect as much as the simple logic of using the people's own music, a part of their culture, in their services since they are already using their language. Informants E, J, and L felt that the people would be able to receive more of an emotional response, be it spiritual or otherwise, from their own music rather than from music from foreign countries. Informant L went on to state that even if the people came to Church only to listen to the music he felt that they benefited just by coming no matter what the reason. He was concerned with the gradual decrease in attendance of the parishoners in recent years and felt that the Church needed updating to keep pace with the modern world. He hoped that these changes would help. Besides, instead of just listening to the choir the people would be familiar with the words and rhythms and so could sing and participate more in the Mass.

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This, he said, was one of the main concerns of the Church - to get the people more active in the Church and thereby making religion a part of their lives and culture. Behind these reasons are also the practical interests of each Church. It is, as informant L stated, difficult to find and hold organists and choir directors formally trained in religious music but, with the new music being used, parishes can make use of local talent. Also, with the Church encouraging the writing of their music, she not only benefits by creating new music for herself but also preserves a part of the Antillian culture that can be appreciated in later years and by others outside the culture.

In Aruba there is a curious situation in that parts of the island are not entirely Aruban. Since the wartime brought about the build up of the Lago refinery and thus stimulated the immigration of many people, mainly Negroes from the British islands and Americans, the area surrounding Lago, which includes Sint Nicolaas, felt the repercussions of this diversity of nationalities and is still feeling it today. These people were outsiders and had their own cultural heritage which they brought with them. This is clearly seen when you compare St. Theresa parish which reflects this mixture with a parish such as St. Anna in Noord which reflects a more Aruban community. That is, an area consisting mostly of old Aruban

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families that have been living on the island for many generations. This would, one might argue, tend to make St. Theresa represent an unusual and different situation and would thus cause it to be out of the normal pattern of change. But curiously, I found that this was not entirely true. Granted, the change has been slow but this is not due only to the mixed races and nationalities of the parish. True, St. Theresa still has the Mass half in English, and the other half in Papiamentu, for the benefit of her many English speaking parishoners, but the changes in music have not been affected as much.

Typically, the Ecumenical changes especially in music have been left to be decided upon first by the diocesses and then the individual parishes. In this way the change has not developed at the same rate in all parishes on the island. The Bishop's office has said nothing officially regarding this trend but has left it to the individual priests to decide what is best for their parishes. I found through my research, however, that the decisions about music rest more than anything else upon a delicate balance between the pastor's wishes and those of the people concerned with the choir. Of course, these all reflect back upon the general attitudes within the parish but only through these people's opinions.

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So, the rate of change is naturally affected by the individual pastor's concern with this question of music and also by the preferences of the choir director and organist. With this in mind one can easily understand why one parish might be making regular use of all the music written to date while another only a few miles away will occasionally use it at special Masses. This is the present situation with St. Anna and St. Theresa Churches. In the former both the pastor and the choir director favor the use of Antillian music especially since the director herself writes some of the music. While in St. Theresa the pastor does not interfere in the decisions of the choir director and the organist, both of whom have been trained in the European tradition and ^{who} still tend to prefer this type. However, the director has attempted to incorporate this music in the last few months. Each have their reasons for using or ⁿot using the music. Most notable, though, is the dissatisfaction with the quality of the pieces and the necessity of having appropriate instruments to play this type of music, for, it is not suited to the organ, the standard instrument in most Churches.

St. Theresa's choir has not sung any Antillian Masses as yet but two choirs have visited the parish and have sung Antillian Masses at these times. They have only recently received the music for one of the Masses,

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the Misa Alegre, and are still preparing it. Informant A attributes this lateness in adopting this music to the condition of the choir. Even though it is a forty man choir only about fifteen show up for practice and church. There is a general lack of enthusiasm and dedication and with this situation existing new music cannot really be practiced. However, St. Theresa is not entirely oblivious to change. They have diversified the type of music used and any one of the Sunday High Masses will prove this. The pastor says this reflects the diversity of peoples in the parish but the organist says that it is mostly done for variety. She feels that people do not always like to hear the same music, so, going along with the half English and half Papiamento scheme of the Masses they do half the songs in English and the other half in Papiamento with Latin being used every now and then. The inclusion of Latin intrigued me and inquiring further, I found that even those Churches advanced in the use of Papiamento and Antillian music still used Latin on special occasions. So, one can see that the change has not completely taken hold and that some of the old ways still favored by some of the pastors and choir directors are used in the parishes.

Talking as I have about this gradual but, nevertheless, directed movement toward the incorporation of the Antillian culture in religious music I have yet to really define what Antillian music is and how it is

adapted to the Mass. Antillian music is itself a controversial topic for each person sees it in a different light. Some, and mostly native born Arubians, consider it a music wholly developed from their culture and entirely different from all other types of music. Still others maintain that it has been influenced by other cultures and is more or less a product of these influences. Informant K, a native Arubian, equated the music with the language. As it was a combination of many different influences mainly Spanish, Dutch and Caribbean so was the music. He said that it grew out of native folk dances and so originally was dance music. Others supported his opinion and stated that the true Antillian music consists of waltzes, tumbas, merenges, dansas. Informant E insisted that this music was basically different from the versions of other countries even if they had the same name and sounded somewhat similar. He based this difference on the accents each country placed on the basic rhythm. He cited as an example the basic waltz. It is found in many cultures and yet in each one has a quality all its own. Where the usual triple time has ~~its~~ a moderate even movement in its beat in Western waltzes such as Strauss, the Antillian waltz has an accent placed on the third beat. Also, like the waltz, the tumba along with the other dance rhythms are found in different areas but still maintain their distinction. The Antillian

tumba is still very different from the tumba found in Venezuela. Both have a somewhat syncopated rhythm but here too the stress is slightly different. This difference could have arisen from the fact that these old melodies are improvised and not usually written down as sheet music. In fact, most of the native musicians on Aruba including the famous musician Padu do not read music but rather play by ear.

With the music being passed down through the generations mostly by ear and not by published sheet music, it has naturally developed differently from that in other countries. With this in mind, one comes back to the problems the Church has in incorporating this type of music in the services. As I said, it first started out by simply translating the words of old English, Dutch and other songs into Papiamentu. This was all done voluntarily by individuals within the Church; in most cases by the clergy since they had more of a knowledge of music and a contact with the Church. One of my informants, F, did this work for St. Theresa's choir when it first was starting out about thirty years ago. At that time it was copied by hand on lined music paper. There were few copies made as it was all done manually with none of it being mimeographed or published. Over the years more and more religious songs were translated some by Monsignor ~~Zeppenfeld~~^Z, Father Van Baars and others. However, these songs were now copied by machine and were

were usually distributed by the individual to the surrounding parishes if they showed an interest in having them. As more songs were being translated a greater variety were used. From this grew the use of the Emmaus Mass(the first Mass on the A side of the tape which can be played now. Not all songs on the tape are from this Mass however. The third song in Papiamento and the instrumental that follows were additions for the Communion processional). This Mass is a Dutch translation of Negro Spirituals by L. Bijl and P.de Coc. The music has remained intact; only the words have been changed to lend them to religious services. I heard this Mass sung once while I was in Aruba and that was when I taped it at Noord. Even though that parish does not have a significant Negro population and the songs are in Dutch, they still use it every now and then for variety. The other parishes on Aruba use it also but not very frequently.

At the present time Father Van Baars is compiling a booklet of songs in Papiamento for Church use which includes not only these old translations of religious songs but also newer ones that he did of American Folk music. Having recently visited the United States he was impressed by the American youth Masses that made use of old folk melodies accompanied by new verses. He was interested enough to translate some of these into

Papiamento and test them out on the young people of his parish. Having received favorable results he included them in his regular youth services. This, he hopes, will further stimulate the utilization of more and varied types of music.

This trend in bringing the people's lives closer to the Mass was aided, as I have said, by the Ecumenical movement. Whereas before they had only been using these songs as extras or for special occasions they now were looked upon as regular songs for, the change over to the vernacular also required that the songs be in the native language. Responding to this need for new music a few people began to look to the Antillian music itself for religious inspiration. As yet there are few composers involved with this work and they receive no monetary reward from the Church for their work. They are not full time composers but rather working lay people so it is to be expected that only a handful of Masses have been written and successfully received by the churches. Many feel that the quality of some of the work so far produced is not equal to what the Church gave up in the Gregorian Chants and other Latin hymns. It must be remembered that this is only the first step in a new field and that quality can only come with experience. The movement is being encouraged, though, not only by the composers themselves

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but also by some of the clergy. Father Van Baars called for a meeting with the composers this past January in Curacao and at that time reviewed their accomplishments urging them to continue their work and also spoke of the direction this movement is taking in the Church. Sister William, a composer herself, has furthered this work here in Aruba. It was through her influence that Mr. Chong wrote his first Mass.

Mr. Chong is a good example of the mixture that is Aruba. He is half Chinese and half Arubian but due to his mother's influence he feels that he is more Arubian than Chinese. So, he exhibits a great attachment to the Antillian culture. This manifests itself in his desire to write still more music based in this tradition for the Church. His first Mass, the Misa Ruba, however has not been accepted as successfully as he hoped.

(A section of this Mass, the Gloria, follows the Emmaus Mass on the A side of the Tape.)

Having been urged by Sister William to attempt a Mass, he completed the Misa Ruba in May of 1967 in time for his brother's wedding. It was first sung by the Childrens' choir of Noord at the Nuptial service in St. Theresa but has not been used in this parish since. However, the choir in Noord and the small parish of Brazil do use it occasionally. Since then he has started another Mass but he says it is difficult for him because he teaches and has other interests as well.

When I inquired how he went about writing this music, he said that since he is an amateur he goes about it slowly. He feels that his music must be entirely original and truly Antillian without traces of outside interests. He says that each rhythm has a quality of its own that can be felt when you listen to them. These rhythms must match the songs for each one represents something different - pleas, thanks, praises. A bolero, for instance, is a slow, soft rhythm that tends to be serious. To this he matched a Kyrie since he felt it was not a joyful song but a more serious one. This, he thought, matched its plea of "Lord have mercy on us." The Gloria that is on the tape was put to a tumba rhythm. This has a quicker beat even though it still has the 2/4 time signature of the bolero. It is full of life and helps to convey the meaning behind the song, a joyful praise of God, the creator and almighty Father. Once he has the rhythm, he then experiments on the guitar searching for a melody that will fit in. This too must reflect and add to the sentiment expressed by the song.

In writing the sheet music he notated only the treble, the melody, for he says that the Arubians know the rhythms so well that they can easily play the bass notes on their own. When musicians play the Gloria they look to see what rhythm ^{it} is, a tumba, and then just learn the particular melody the composer has written for that one. Writing music like this, he admitted, makes it difficult

for those not familiar with the style to play ^{the} and accompaniment. But these people would find it difficult anyhow without ever hearing it played correctly for there is usually very little notation given and the accents must be placed correctly. As of now his Mass has not been published commercially. It has been taped, however, and played on one of the Aruban radio stations but it has never approached a commercial market. It has been mimeographed for some churches and copies can be easily gotten through them.

Some people have voiced their displeasure with his style. Informant A felt that it was too dancy and unsuitable for Mass. Mr. Chong has, nevertheless, continued and has encouraged others to help considering this an opportunity for Arubians to find pride in their own national music.

Better known than Mr. Chong's work is that of two Curacaoans', Mr. Simon and Mr. Provence. (Selections from their Masses are on the B side of the tape.) Both are teachers yet they have still found the time to compose a few Masses. Their work has been accepted more favorably than any of the others to date. This may be because of the superior quality of their work. For, the Masses are truly Antillian and yet dignified enough for Mass. They reflect the native music without any of the "dancy" qualities. Almost every parish on Aruba has heard some of their work. The most popular

seems to be Mr. Provence's first and second Masses and Mr. Simon's Misa Alegre. The latter has been the only Mass so far to be recorded by a commercial firm on record but as of November 1969 it has been dropped as a recording. Their work has been distributed in much the same way as the others. Informant J said that she received a great part of her Antillian music from Curacao on tape without the written music. She must first rewrite the music herself from the tape and then mimeograph it. Mimeographed copies and tapes are often sent by the composers to the parishes on request from the choir directors. It is their responsibility to order new music for their particular choirs. The Church as a unit does not distribute music among the parishes. When copies are received it is up to the individual parish to have more copies mimeographed if they need them.

The second composer I interviewed, informant J, has not been as successful in her attempts as the others. She has written about four Masses but these have been mostly done in her own parish, Noord. It is through her influence as choir director that St. Anna Church is as forward as it is in the use of this music. All the music used here within the past year has been either a translation or actual Antillian music. If you will listen to the tape you will see that her music is very different from the other versions. (Her Kyrie and Aspergus Mei are the last works on side B of the tape.)

I have taped mostly the same sections of the Masses of these composers in order to make it easier to compare their different qualities. While all of the other three composers have written Antillian music, informant J has not. Her work is so very obviously influenced by her European background that it in no way sounds like Antillian music. This is not to say that her work is inferior for, it is not. It is just not Antillian. It has been so slowed down that even if Antillian rhythms were used they are no longer recognizable. She has, however, accomplished one thing. She has had enough influence with others to give Aruba a direction and a boost toward Antillian music.

This boost in Antillian music has brought about a boost in the use of private bands and combos. These are not to be confused for there is a difference between the two. The band really refers to the "beat" band, as informant L explained. That is, they use electric guitars, organs, drums and amplifiers. This is the type of band that played the Emmaus Mass and plays for the youth Masses. The combo is a more Antillian musical group that usually improvises its music during jam sessions. It is considered Antillian because of this music and the Caribbean instruments they play - the guitar, the quitar, a type of guitar, maracas, the raspar (wiri-wiri) a metal scraping instrument and the tambu, a type of drum, beside others.

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Informant L felt that the combo should be preferred not only because of its relationship with the culture and its suitability for the music but also because of the greater number of musicians available for a combo of this sort. Not many of these groups have been used as yet but it is expected that they will be in the future. This type of music calls for rhythmic instruments and is not really suited to organs. Mr. Simon in his dedication of the written sheet music of the Misa Alegre hoped that it would be sung and played with such instruments in a respectable manner. There is still, however, a reluctance on the part of the priests to use these instruments. They fear that it would not seem proper. Although there are a few who still maintain this view, most parishoners have not objected the few times they have been used during Mass. And, in a questionnaire polled in the St. Franciscus Church in Oranjestad 61% were in favor of the introduction of these instruments in the Church.

The publishing and distribution, as I have said, takes place entirely within the Church. None of it has been done for profit. When copies have been made they have been either mimeographed or printed in Booklet form for the individual church. This applies not only to the Antillian music but also to the translations. Since these have been used longer there is a greater number of them and most parishes have compiled missals of their own which include these songs. In St. Theresa this missal was compiled by Father Van Baars a few years ago and printed by a local firm. The songs are written

in stanza form without musical notation. There are other smaller booklets too that are used during special seasons by the churches but these are all rapidly being replaced by the newly composed songs. These have yet to be compiled in one book however. All this has been done for the benefit of the people in the parishes. They are expected to join in with the choir in the singing; this has not been the case though. In most parishes the people are accustomed to listening to the choir and still decline to join in even with familiar songs. As more and more of their music is used it is hoped that this situation will change.

In general, the people have not been vocal with respect to the introduction of the music. They are reluctant to voice their opinions; this may be because they do not want to be labeled either too old fashioned or even disrespectful. But the attendance at the Antillian Masses is much better than at the others especially with the young. Informant J said that while none have complained yet, a few have exclaimed their pleasure over it. Informant H has even said those who fear the music to be improper and more popular than Church-like can be satisfied if the tempo is slowed a bit. For, the people do not object to their music but just to its place in the Church. Nevertheless, the change is going on and as with all changes it has its

supporters as well as detractors. Some feel that the change is too slow but most prefer it this way. The future is with the young of the parishes, those most actively involved with the change. It is hoped that all these innovations will bring a new and a fresh look at their music, a look that will bring more of a meaning to the Mass for the people.

APPENDIX

- A Mrs. Agnes Boskaljon-Huith, organist at St. Theresa in Sint Nicolaas, age - late fifties, contacted through Father Van Veen
- B Father Van Veen, pastor of St. Theresa in Sint Nicolaas, age - fifties, got his name from the informant file.
- C Rev. Calitis, pastor of the Lago Community Church in Seroe Colorado, age - 28, contacted through Sherene Bougher.
- D Mr. Lieveeld, director of the choir of the Lago Community Church and the "Vivons en Chantant", age - 30, contacted through Rev. Calitis.
- E Mr. Booi, Dept. of Culture and Education in Oranjestad, age - late fifties, contacted through the informant file.
- F Sister Ludwiges, Dominican sister from the Maria convent in Oranjestad, was former director of St. Theresa's choir, age - 60, contacted through Mrs. Huith.
- G Mr. Joseph Verhoeven, director of the choir in St. Theresa, age - about 30, contacted through Mrs. Huith.
- H Mr. Chong, teacher and composer of religious Antillian music, age - about 30, contacted through Mrs. Huith.
- I Father Van Vaart, pastor of St. Anna in Noord, age - fifties, contacted through Father Van Veen.
- J Sister William, director of the choir at Noord and composer of religious Antillian music, age - forties, contacted through Father Van Vaart.
- K Severiano Luydens, works for Lago as tour guide and also owns the concession at the natural bridge (has knowledge of Antillian music), age - fifties, met him at the natural bridge.
- L Father Van Baars, pastor of the Santa Familia Church in Willemstad, Curacao and translator of Antillian religious music, age - forties, contacted through Father Van Veen.
- M Jane, a maid employed by the center who attends services at St. Theresa, age - twenties, met her because of her employment.
- N Gloria, maid employed by the Aruba Research Center acquainted with the new use of Antillian music in the Catholic Church, age - twenties, met through her employment.